

Movie Makers

September-October 2003

Volume 13 No. 5

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

Our Festival

Matt Jenkins

Film Festivals come and go. It is surprising to see the number of new festivals that pop up each year and others disappear from sight.

One that comes to mind, the Silver State Documentary Festival was sponsored by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Having placed in this festival twice, I was surprised the year they announced it would not be held. And it hasn't been held since.

Running a film festival is not an easy task. There has to be advertising announcing the call for entries. The entries have to be gathered and gone through to make sure everything asked for is provided. Someone has to keep track of the money. Judges have to be found and arrangements have

to be made to view and judge the entries. Entries then have to be returned and a winner's reel produced. Winner's plaques and certificates have to be created and awarded and then there has to be some sort of screening which has to be announced and scheduled and so on.

The festival that the American Motion Picture Society sponsors has been continuously run since 1930. It is the oldest continuously held festival in the United States. I am proud of that fact.

However, in re-reading the late George Cushman's words regarding the history of our festival, I do stand corrected on one point. I have always proclaimed that our festival judges all entries and when I served as festival chair all entries were judged. However, George pointed out that if there

were more than 40 entries received then perhaps a pre-screener would be used to select the entries for judging.

It is interesting to read about the origins of our festival and the 10 best. George indicated that only amateur entries were eligible for ten best selection. I agree with that idea. However, as festival chair, I had the judges select the top three winners regardless if they were amateur or professional and then had a separate ten best of amateur only entries. The ten best were not ranked in any order. As I want to see our festival continue, I think this is the method of judging that should continue so we can attract a variety of entries. If I am considered a "professional" by those who consider themselves amateurs, why would I want to enter a festival only to be restricted to the possibility

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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**George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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From the Editor

Maybe this column should be re-named "Nautilus, Saga, Part 3, the Story Continues." I finished the U.S.S. Nautilus documentary after returning to Connecticut and re-taping the interviews due to poor audio quality the first time. The documentary edit went well and the finished product ended up being about 26 minutes in length. It contains fantastic historical footage and interviews with two former crewmembers.

At my brother's suggestion, I entered this production in the



Greenwich Film Festival. In its third year, this festival was established to showcase independent and non-distributed movies and videos. The festival takes place over four days in September in picturesque Greenwich, Connecticut.

Considerable time goes by and I was complaining to a colleague that it was a weak festival year so far for me. Immediately after this conver-

sation, I check my e-mail and to my surprise, I was accepted into this festival. Now the documentary I completed last year on the skipjack was entered into nine film festivals and rejected from all of them. The Greenwich Film Festival was the only one I entered the Nautilus into and it was accepted. I am thrilled.

I shot this documentary in SONY DVCAM and the festival only accepts digi-beta for screening. So I called a friend, Rick Lippert of Lippert Media and asked where I could have a copy made. He wanted to know the other formats that the festival accepted for screening. As far as I knew the only formats acceptable for screening were 16mm, 35mm and digi-beta. He thought that this must be a pretty important festival to only accept what he considered to premiere formats.

The Greenwich Film Festival is being held from September 22 until September 28th. If you happen to be in the Connecticut area during this time, try to visit this festival. I'll see you there.

The other big documentary for this summer was the one I led my students in shooting with NO SCRIPT. We shot something like 38 interviews in 14 days. It was a hectic pace. We also went out to Ft. Sill and managed to videotape the soldiers firing

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Pictures Judges See

No 23 – March 1995

George Cushman

Editor's Note: Sometime ago Movie Makers began reprinting articles that George Cushman wrote in the early 1990's. The articles stopped appearing when the number of articles submitted by members increased and space became limited. With this article, AMPS continues to republish Mr. Cushman's articles.

Festivals today are flooded with a variety of film (and video) types and styles. Judges have to sit through the bad ones hoping a few good ones will come along.

Following are descriptions of what festival judges see today, starting with the least worthy efforts:

THE FAMILY FILM. These were plentiful in years gone by, but thankfully they are not as common today. They depicted the family on outings, celebrating birthdays, Christmas, pursuing hobbies and glimpses of other personal activities. It is rare to see these subjects in the winner's column any more, largely because today's pic-

ture maker prefers to try something more creative and challenging.

THE DIARY FILM. Normally it describes a family experience but of somewhat greater interest to a general audience. The diary film documents a family experience, often a trip to a foreign land, known here as travelogs. (Europe calls them tourist films.) When treated as a diary, showing family members in countless scenes and a personal commentary by the maker, these are, indeed, a diary on film. Such films can make fine documentaries when treated objectively, that is, when the maker leaves himself and his family entirely out of both the picture and the narration. Diary films should never be submitted to a major competition.

THE INTERVIEW FILM. It is surprising how many of these are submitted to festivals. The worst consist of people looking at the camera and expressing an opinion, reading a poem, championing a cause, or relating a personal experience. There is no action, nothing moves, and they can in no way be called a motion picture.

THE ILLUSTRATED RADIO PLAY. Festivals get a lot of these. A story is being enacted on the screen, but in a "voice over" the narrator tells what the story is, what the actors are doing and even at

times what they are saying. Such efforts could just as well be on radio as the images are no more than illustrations of what the narrator is saying. A good judge spots these films quickly for what they are.

THE FILMED STAGE PLAY. A producer reads a one-act play, likes it, and decides to film it. He often uses one set and all the filming is done on that set. His actors speak their lines and tell the story verbally, exactly as is done on the stage. While, the story may come across clearly, it is delivered by the spoken lines of the actors, not by their visual action. If such a picture wins, you may be sure the judges were not on their toes.

THE COPIED STILL. This genre was quite common 30 years ago and is occasionally seen today. A filmer "copies" someone else's photographs, usually from a famous book or album. On the screen the narrator describes what is to be shown. The maker, having heard movies should move, moves his camera slowly from side to side and uses his zoom lens. The pictures as such may move across the screen but the subjects in the frame remain static. When these pictures win it is because the judges were swept away with the subject and the story, and not with the production method.

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Framing An Interview

Matt Jenkins

On camera interviews are used in news stories, documentaries, TV talk shows and other types of programs. The talking head is still an important aspect of many kinds of productions. While directors strive to eliminate the talking head through using B roll or having the interviewee move while talking, nevertheless the talking head still exists.

Framing the interviewee may suggest acceptance or rejection by the audience. How the shot is set may portray the subject as comfortable or ill at ease. Camera height in relation to the subject may indicate superiority or inferiority.

As camera operators, how we frame someone is extremely important to our production's success. There are three basic ways to frame a person speaking on camera.

THE TWO SHOT. As the name implies, this shot includes both the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer is looking at the interviewee and the interviewer controls the microphone, first using it to ask a question and

then aiming it at the subject who responds. This shot is usually done "over the shoulder." This means the camera is behind the interviewer and is placed so the shot reveals part of the shoulder and side of the head of the interviewer and the interviewee is seen facing the interviewer. Its best of this kind of shot is used sparingly.

LOOKING INTO THE LENS. In this method of framing, the subject is alone and looks directly into the camera lens. Usually framed as a mid shot or medium shot, generally only the head and shoulders of the interviewee are visible. This framing is reserved for when the subject has something of extreme importance to say directly to the audience. A presidential address to the nation is an example of this framing.



An example of a 3/4 shot

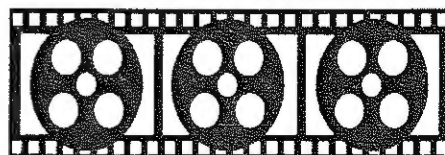
THE 3/4 SHOT. Again, the subject is framed alone. However, the subject is framed at a slight angle and appears to be addressing someone off-screen. Also, only head and shoulders are

usually visible. This is the most familiar method of framing someone in television.

Interesting though, documentary maker William Rabiger does not like using the 3/4 shot. His thought is that framing someone in 3/4 indicates that there is someone unseen off-screen who this person is talking with and this is a way to inject that unseen person, usually the producer, into the production. Rabiger concludes that the production is not about that unseen person, it is about the topic being presented.

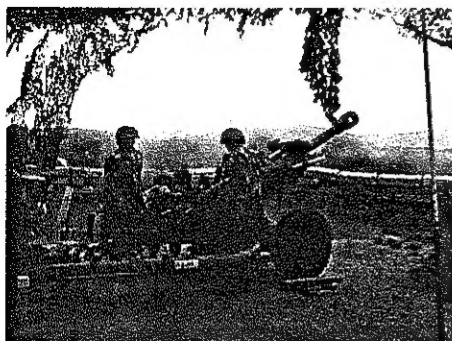
So he believes it would be wiser to use the framing style of the person talking directly to the camera.

It is often evident that some news reporters do whatever they can to put their faces into stories. These people haven't learned that the story isn't about them, it is about the topic. Yet, Rabiger's alternative, having the subject look directly at the camera, may be too extreme for most productions. The audience is comfortable with the 3/4 shot. Imagine all the interviewees looking directly at the camera, it might be unsettling.



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their howitzers. Many students who have grown up here and have heard the boom of the artillery over the years have never witnessed

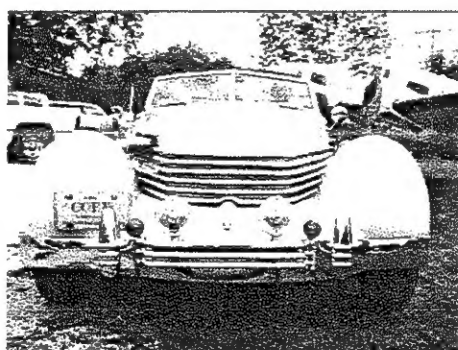


the live firing. So this was a once in a lifetime experience for them. The documentary's premise was that the military creates a unique community of ethnically diverse people in Lawton. It was told strictly with interviewees only, no voice over narration or on-camera host. Even the students expressed doubt that this would work. However, the end result was dramatic. They did their work well and the completed product is impressive.

We took it to our state public broadcasting system and the producers just had a field day, with all sorts of criticism. In fact one big criticism was the music selected for the documentary. The students chose local musicians to perform original works. So there was rock, and rap and some slower kinds of music. But they were criticized because "this was Oklahoma and there should be country music, not rap!" I have shown

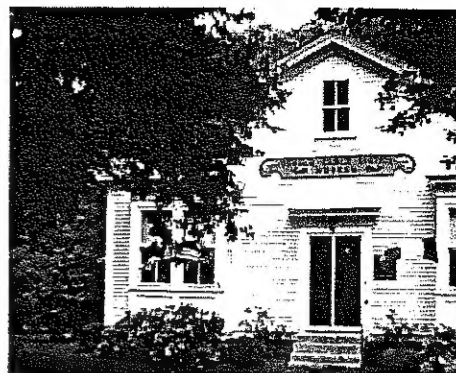
this documentary to other people and the one comment that all have said was how much they liked the music. I find that extremely interesting. I think there will be more to write about this documentary in the future as it is being entered into film festivals.

Currently I am in production on a documentary called "Pray's Passion." It is the story of Glenn Pray, who back in 1960 purchased the Auburn-Cord-Duesenberg Company and moved it from Indiana to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Within four years



he was manufacturing Cords and after the Cord, he was manufacturing Auburn "boattail" roadsters. It is a fascinating story and he is such a genuine and kind person. I am enjoying this production immensely.

I spent some time on Cape Cod this summer. And even with the tremendous amount of people there, I had an enjoyable visit. I stopped at an interesting museum in Orleans called the French Cable Museum. This museum was once the office of the



French Cable Company. No not television cable, transatlantic cable. And it was extremely interesting how transatlantic messages were sent in the early part of the twentieth century. And yes, you are right, I plan to do a documentary over this as all the original equipment is there and the descendants of the original operators serve as tour guides.

It's great to the editor and being able to relate what I am doing. I hope that I encourage others to get to work and produce epic productions. I also welcome your stories about your own productions.

As I write this column, there still has been no announcement of the winners for our own festival. However, let me be the first to congratulate those who do win and encourage those who did not that another festival year is coming. I think our festival is important and worthy of supporting.

As always, you may e-mail me at mattj@cameron.edu.

Taking Audio to Higher Levels

Matt Jenkins

Though many of us may use consumer grade equipment, it doesn't mean that we have to create consumer grade productions. Framing, lighting, and audio are all things that we can control in our own productions.

As a professor, I am fortunate to be able to look over new production texts. In reading the new edition of *Digital Movie Making* by Lynne Gross and Larry Ward, there is an interesting discussion concerning audio.

Gross and Ward begin by talking about "spotting." The term spotting refers to the act of reviewing the footage, preferably after the visuals and the dialog are edited, and determining audio needs. Spotting includes sound effects, dialog replacement, and music.

In my documentary regarding the U.S.S. Nautilus, it was evident that I needed sound effects for the historical footage. This film footage was silent and it

needed the sound of the sub moving in the water while under way on the surface. Where am I going to find vessels moving through the ocean sounds? Fortunately I had previously produced a documentary regarding a sailboat and had recorded the boat sailing in the water. The swooshing sound fit well with the Nautilus footage.

You may also purchase sound effects CDs to use. You may also manipulate sound effects to create the sound necessary for a production.

After the sounds are selected, "sweetening" occurs. This involves making the audio sound appropriate for the production. Usually manipulated through a computer program, you can change tonal characteristics. For example, your hero is in a cave, you might add reverb to the voice to provide more of an echo effect.

Next, sounds are placed in relation to the video. This is known as positioning. If you are using a non-linear editor, positioning is as simple as inputting the audio and placing it on the time line. If you are using tape to tape editing, you will have to position the sound and mix it as it is edited. On a time line, you can always go back and adjust the audio levels at any time.

Mixing is the last step to con-

sider. As previously stated, if using non-linear editing, loudness can be adjusted at anytime.

So in considering audio for your production, think about audio needs, how audio is acquired, sweetened, positioned and mixed into the project.

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of winning an honorable mention?

Our festival will soon be celebrating its 75th year. I would love to see 100+ entries in the festival that were experienced when George was the newsletter editor. However that would mean getting the word out and advertising by e-mail and by ad placement in such magazines as *Filmmaker*. That would mean using a prescreeener for more than 40 entries and perhaps embracing the idea of selecting the top three entries regardless of who produced them.

I would also like to see some sort of retrospect of winners from past years, perhaps what they are doing and a reel of past award winning work. It would be neat to have a special session at the convention to celebrate the oldest continuously held film and video festival. Now is the time to make the hard decisions and make plans.

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THE FILMED VERBAL JOKE.

These are quite common. The filmer hears a funny story and thinks it would be a great movie. But the story is told in dialog, and the climax, the final line, is always spoken. What became of sight gags, the main staple of classic screen comedy? Good film comedies are seen, not heard.

THE FILMED BOOK.

Many a good book makes a good movie, but usually not the way the book is written. In books the action is described with words, on the screen the action must be shown. Book passages must be transformed into action and not all books offer this possibility. When the story in a book can be told in action, success is

close at hand. But a lot of effort has to go into the script to meet this challenge.

THE MOVING IMAGE FILM.

This is what the judges have been waiting for, movie making at its best, a story told primarily by its moving images with a minimum of dialog and talk. Fine, but why are so many pictures like the above examples seen on a festival program? Because there are so few really fine pictures made, the judges have to sort out those not as exemplary for the second place and the honorable mentions. Were the awards made only for classic examples of the best in the filmmaker's art, few trophies would be given.

A Special Note Concerning this year's American International Film and Video Festival.

As of the time this publication went to press, the winners of this year's American International Film and Video Festival have not been announced. One way to find out about the winners and view the winner's reel is to attend this year's convention.

The entrants and winners will be announced in an upcoming issue of *Movie Makers*.

Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival name and address for forms		Open to	Subject	Format	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
Oct 10 2003	Australian Widescreen Association Entry forms are available at www.users.bigpond.net.au/awa.htm See competitions Forum. Then go to Text Or pdf for an entry form				HJ L N in 16:9 widescreen				
A Amateur B College C Grade 1-12		D Independent E Professional F Restricted	G Open	H S8,8mm J 16mm K VHS L SVHS	M Hi8, 8mm N Mini DV O other	S Regional T Exceptions U Cash V Trophies	W Certificates X Other Award		Y Members Z Non Members

Do you have any back issues of MovieMakers?

Members of the American Motion Picture Society are interested in obtaining back issues of the *MovieMakers* newsletter. If anyone has back issues that they would like to contribute please contact Roger Garretson at RGA-RETSON@AOL.COM.

Thank you!

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